

Paratextual analysis of *Autobiographies* by William Butler Yeats

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Abstract

William Butler Yeats who was born on 13th of June 1865 in Ireland is world famous Nobel laureate poet and writer. He is also known as playwright who wrote unforgettable works and inspired many other great playwrights such as John Millington Synge to write plays. Love for woman, nation, God, land, freedom and independence are some of themes in his poems. The purpose of this study is to analyse Irish statesman, William Butler Yeats from different perspective through the book *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats Vol. III: Autobiographies* whose editors are William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald. It was published in New York in 1999 by Scribner. Paratextuality approach which is determining criteria for evaluating life of the poet belongs to French literary critic Gérard Genette. Paratext is comprised of two texts which are peritext and epitext. Peritext is everything related within the book and epitext is accepted all the things outside of the book. Epitext will be in the focus of the paper. Some reveries over his childhood and youth will be told and a new approach which is paratextuality will be introduced to new researchers. By this way, it may contribute to analyse life and works of other great literary figures.

Keywords: Poems, paratextuality, Genette, epitext, peritext.

William Butler Yeats'in *Autobiographies* adlı eserinin yanmetinsel analizi

Öz

13 Haziran 1865'te İrlanda'da doğan William Butler Yeats dünyaca ünlü Nobel edebiyat ödüllü yazar ve şairdir. Aynı zamanda unutulmaz eserler yazan John Millington Synge gibi diğer büyük yazarlara ilham veren bir oyun yazarı olarak da bilinir. Kadın, ulus, Tanrı, toprak, özgürlük ve bağımsızlık şiirlerindeki birkaç temadan bazılarıdır. İrlandalı devlet adamı William Butler Yeats'i *editörleri* William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald olan *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats Vol. III: Autobiographies* adlı yapıtı aracılığıyla farklı bir bakış açısından değerlendirmek amaçlanmıştır. Eser 1999 yılında New York'ta Scribner tarafından yayınlanmıştır. Şairin yaşamını değerlendirmekte belirleyici ölçüt olan Yanmetinsellik yaklaşımı Fransız edebiyat eleştirmeni Gérard Genette'ye aittir. Yanmetin metin çevresi ve yapıt çevresi olmak üzere iki metinden oluşur. Kitabın içerisindeki her şey metin çevresi yanmetin unsurudur ve kitap dışındaki her şey de yapıt çevresi yanmetin unsuru olarak kabul edilir. Yapıt çevresi yanmetin unsuru bu çalışmanın odak noktası olacaktır. Bazı çocukluk ve gençlik anıları anlatılacak ve yeni bir yaklaşım olan yanmetinsellik yeni arařtırmacılara tanıtılacaktır. Böylece diğer büyük edebiyatçıların hayatları ve eserlerinin incelenmesine de katkı sağlayacaktır.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Şiirler, yanmetinsellik, Genette, yapıt çevresi yanmetin unsuru, metin çevresi yanmetin unsuru.

I. Introduction

Reading and writing have been identified by many circles in various platforms. According to Cambridge online dictionary reading is: 1. the skill or activity of getting information from books, 2. An occasion when something written, especially a work of literature, is spoken to an audience (www.dictionry.cambridge.com). Reading is explained as 1. the activity of somebody who reads, 2. an act of reading something (www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). However, these explanations are technical and denotational. Reading has some more connotational meanings.

Reading is one of the basic skills that distinguishes people from animals. Some people think that reading helps human to find himself. It gives information about past, present and future. A paragraph, a sentence or even a simple word may lead you to think and broaden your horizon. Reading also sets inner peace of people. By this way, we can start to think that there are people like us in different places of the world and it gives us pleasure. You relax when you see that there is one person like you who experienced the same events and pains in the past. Reading can be a good friend also. It makes you forget your loneliness. It is paradoxical situation that a person finds himself by reading but forgets, loses himself between pages. It gives you pleasure when you find yourself, it hurts when you lose yourself. Nevertheless, some people feel vice versa. Reading helps you to develop yourself and discover the strength in you. It is a research, a type of questioning.

Reading is freedom for some of the people who believe that it is the best way to express the feelings and beliefs. Reading takes you to the lands that you have ever been to. Due to economic reasons, it is really difficult to travel around the world. However, reading about those places will improve your imagination. Reading gives meanings to lives of people. Page by page a person can learn. He learns that he knows nothing but learns at the same time. That is, reading makes you man. Reading makes human matured and understanding.

By reading, a student can make decisions about his/her future. He/she can choose the ideal occupation after reading about it in a book. At that time, it becomes a key for the future of people. One can see his own faults while reading a book. For instance, he can understand that he makes some mistakes through the characters in the novel he reads or in school books he/she can aware how he badly treated his friends and siblings.

Writing is explained as 1. A person's style of writing with a pen on paper that can be recognized as their own, 2. something that has been written or printed (www.dictionry.cambridge.com). Its definition is also given as 1. the activity of writing, in contrast to reading, speaking, etc. 2. The activity of writing books, articles, etc., especially as a job (www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Without reading, writing is nearly impossible. If you want to write something firstly you need to read. Reading gives inspiration for writing. It is not possible to say that everybody can write his ideas and thoughts easily. A person cannot write unless he reads. Some people like to share their writings while some others keep it as a secret. Writing enables people to share their feelings. It gives opportunity to deaf and speech handicapped people to tell themselves. Writing enables people to make their feelings and ideas immortal. People read them and start to show empathy towards them. May be people who have never cared about people with disabilities will learn about them after reading a book or a text written by them.

Reading is also an opportunity to learn about literary figures that you haven't seen since he/she died. William Butler Yeats who was born on 13th of June 1865 in Ireland is world famous Nobel laureate poet and writer. He is also known as playwright who wrote unforgettable works and inspired many other great playwrights such as John Millington Synge to write plays. "Beginning as a late Victorian aesthete and ending as an influential contemporary of Eliot and other modernists, Yeats set the pace for two generations of important writers." (Holdeman, 2006: ix). Yeats was enrolled into Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. "I have grown happier with every year of life as though gradually conquering something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others but were a part of my own mind." (O'Donnell, Archibald, & Yeats, 2010: 45). In 1889, he published his first volume of poetry: *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*.

In his early twenties, for example, he takes up the role of Irish poet. Intent on developing an Irish literary tradition, he delved into Irish legend, folklore, myth, and literature, editing, translating, and publishing Irish texts and thereby bringing back to life a national tradition. Further, he renews this tradition by producing plays and poems specifically Irish in content and interwoven with Irish tales that he refashions to suit his poetic purposes (Hoffman, 2009: 105).

In 1894, Yeats became involved with the Irish Literary Theatre, later he became its chief playwright, many of his plays were performed there and at the Abbey Theatre, also known as the National Theatre of Ireland which was opened in 1904. His language and choice of words make him universal. He addresses to people from all structures of society. "Yeats performs aurally and physically that which has impressed his creative mind, and in putting to pen to page, he seeks first some aural pattern for his words that encompasses and can be understood by all people at all times." (Hoffman, 2009: 6). In the same year, he established the Cuala Press. He was elected as Irish Senate in 1922. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He died of illness in 1939 in Menton, France. David Holdeman states that "...he had instructed George to bury him temporarily in France and then later remove his body to Drumcliff in County Sligo. She accordingly arranged for a temporary grave in nearby Roquebrune." (Holdeman, 2006: 114).

II. Method

It is expected to analyse Irish statesman, playwright, thinker, educator, poet William Butler Yeats from different perspective through the book *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats Vol. III: Autobiographies* whose editors are William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald. It was published in New York, in 1999, by Scribner. Thanks to developed media sources such as Tv, internet, online newspapers and social media services, it is really easy to get information about famous people. Any one googling about William Butler Yeats see thousands and millions of items about him. Most probably he/she most probably sees advertisements of his works. Those ads or posters and pictures about him are good sources of getting information to evaluate Yeats and his works. In order to achieve this, paratextuality will help the researcher. Paratextuality is the term belonging to French literary theorist Gérard Genette who has French origins. According to him:

Paratextuality: The subject of the present book, comprising those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (*peritext*) and outside it (*epitext*), that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords - all those framing elements that so engaged Sterne; but also the elements in the public and private history of the book, its "epitext," that are analyzed in the latter part of this volume: "public epitexts" (from the author or publisher) as well as "private epitexts" (authorial correspondence, oral confidences, diaries, and pretexts). (Genette, 1997: XVIII)

A text has relations with other texts. “A text without its paratext is sometimes like an elephant without a mahout, a paratext without its text is a mahout without an elephant.” (Genette,1997:410) That is, paratext is combination of peritext and epitext. Peritext is one side of paratext. Everything within the book such as cover, table of contents, comments on the back of the book and in the front page, features of printing (bold, italic, Times New Roman, Georgia, etc.) colour of the pages, blank pages, titles and subtitles are all peritexts. All of them help readers to read the book comfortably. In other words, they give the reader both connotation and denotation. For instance, the subtitle Volume III gives reader the message that there are other works of Yeats. It may continue. Any item regarding the book or the author, poet, playwright created by the people or by the writer of the book are all called epitexts. Epitexts are very useful hints or devices to introduce a new work or remind an old one. It can be said that any item outside of the book can be considered as epitext. They may contribute to the understanding of the reader and lead people to infer some other meanings or catch the message behind the text.

Reading has been assumed to be a bilateral activity. Actually, the publisher has been neglected and sometimes forgotten. When there is problem of reaching any kind of work, publishing house was regarded as responsible side of reading and writing activity. Reading and writing is a type of connection, relationship between reader and writer. Publishers are seen as the agency or money making companies. In fact, publisher is the other important trivet. Publishers have come onto the stage and people have seen that they are crucial part of reading activity. It can be said that with paratextuality publisher is included in the triangle.

III. Findings

People who would like to learn about life of the archpoet-William Butler Yeats- can find a great number of online sources. The book analysed in this paper was edited by William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald. J. Fraser Cocks III and Gretchen Schwenker are assistant editors. Editors' preface comes after contents table. Editors gave textual introduction part to introduce chapters of the book and make it easy for the readers to understand the lines of Yeats. Then, there is acknowledgements which is followed by list of abbreviations. The book is 560 pages. A reader or a person who writes down name of the book on any search engine such as Yandex, Google, Yaani, etc. he will see different versions. Depending on their choice, readers can either get e-books or they can read the book when they sign in various websites. They can buy the book by paying. Moreover, they can select type of payment. They can buy it from www.barnesandnoble.com, www.indiebound.addlibra.com, www.booksamillion.com, etc. Also websites offer different options. People who cannot afford to buy new edition of the book can prefer buying second hand *Autobiographies*. The following figure was retrieved from www.simonandschuster.com:

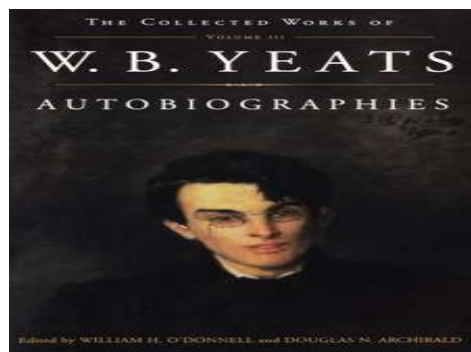


Figure 1: Image of the book *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats Volume III: Autobiographies*

An epitext has five features which are spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and functional. It means that an epitext must answer to the questions of where, when, how, from whom to whom, to do what.

The approach we will take in studying each of these elements, or rather each of these types of elements, is to consider a certain number of features that, in concert, allow us to define the status of a paratextual message, whatever it may be. These features basically describe a paratextual message's spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics. More concretely: defining a paratextual element consists of determining its location (the question *where?*); the date of its appearance and, if need be, its disappearance (*when?*); its mode of existence, verbal or other (*how?*); the characteristics of its situation of communication - its sender and addressee (*from whom? to whom?*); and the functions that its message aims to fulfill (*to do what?*). (Genette,1997:4)

Spatial feature tells the reader about the place of the epitext. "The location of the epitext is therefore anywhere outside the book - but of course nothing precludes its later admission to the peritext." (Genette,1997: 344). The epitext above is found on website. So it can be stated that it is online ad. It is available in digital platform. In order to define temporal feature of an epitext, it is vital that you should know the time when the author was born and when he/she died.

To designate elements that appear after the author's death, I – like everyone else - will use the term *posthumous*; to designate elements produced during the author's lifetime, I will adopt the neologism proposed by my good master Alphonse Allais: *anthumous* paratext. (Genette,1997: 6)

If the epitext is created after the death of the author it is called posthumous, but if it is produced during his/her lifetime, it becomes an anthumous epitext. Yeats died in 1939 so the epitext is said to be posthumous.

Substantial characteristics of an epitext indicates in which form the paratextual element, here it is epitext, is created. Epitexts are found in many forms since there is no time and space limit for them. The epitext analysed here is observed on screen in virtual platform as a kind of ad. It is a visual epitext, then.

Pragmatically, epitexts are evaluated in terms of sender and receiver or addressor and addressee. Who sends the epitext to whom is concerned here. Addressor of the epitext can be said to be William Butler Yeats, and firstly readers in general are addressee. Number of addressee changes in accordance with the perspective you make analysis. Primarily, readers of Yeats and his fans and literary circle are addressee; however, the epitext is not only open to them. Also people from different parts of society, that is public can be accepted as the addressee.

"The effect of the paratext lies very often in the realm of influence - indeed, manipulation -experienced subconsciously." (Genette,1997: 409). Thus, aim of the epitext can vary. Here, point of view becomes significant since "the most essential of the paratext's properties, as we have observed many times (but, in concluding, I still want to insist on it), is functionality." (Genette,1997: 407). It is open to discussion. From some readers' perspective, function of this epitext is financial. That is, aim of editors is to earn money. Also they may claim that Amazon makes money by selling books of great literary figures like Yeats. Nevertheless, this conception may not reflect ideas of all the readers. It cannot be generalized. It cannot be approved until they make an interview with the publisher, founders of Amazon and editors. Hence, there is no clear evidence. On the other hand, people think that editors provide them with universal works of literary men. They can believe that it is necessary that people thank to all of them. One can assert that compared to the present day writers, great literary men in the past did not write for financial purposes. Their aim was not to earn too much money and become rich. However, this assertion most probably will not be accepted in general. Because, it is not fair to say that writers in the past wrote

for their country, ideals, love, freedom, independence, etc. without financial expectations, all of the present day writers write in order to make money and that is why their works are published in a very short time. From editors' perspective, it is to make contribution to literary world with this work. Genette believes:

“The paratext is only an assistant, only an accessory of the text. And if the text without its paratext is sometimes like an elephant without a mahout, a power disabled, the paratext without its text is a mahout without an elephant, a silly show.” (Genette,1997: 410)

IV. Conclusion

The epitext which is in the centre of research is in digital platform. It is a posthumous epitext. It is visual. Addressor is Yeats directly and William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald can be considered as indirect addressors or Amazon and they may be agents, mediums. Readers are addressed directly, public is addressed indirectly. People dealing with literature, readers and fans of Yeats are primarily concerned. Paratextuality can be applied in other disciplines such as art, music, cinema, theatre, sports, etc. It allows the people to see the troubles of writing a book and how important the publisher is. For publishers, paratextuality is really a good way of expressing themselves, by this way people can start to comprehend. Thinking the rapid development of technology paratextuality may be one of the most common approach. Internet services, smart phones and mobile applications are good sources of paratext. People will have chance to learn about some other world famous literary figures and their lives thanks to paratextuality. It might play an important role to understand other great literary figures' ideas, thoughts on education, policy, art through paratextuality and encourage new researches and studies on Yeats and other figures in the world literature. Finally, the paper is posthumous, written epitext according to Genette's criteria. Aim of this epitext is to evaluate Yeats' *Autobiographies* through paratextuality and remember the arch poet and introduce him to new generations to the people from different geographies. It was created for academic study.

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Figure 1: Image of the book *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats Volume III: Autobiographies*
Retrieved August,12,2019

from <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Collected-Works-of-W-B-Yeats-Vol-III-Autobiographies/Douglas-Archibald/9780684853383>

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